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SUBJECT: FRENCH PREVIEW OF JANUARY FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Kathy Allegrone, Reasons 1.
4 (b), (d).

¶1. (SBU) On January 22, Mathieu Carmona, MFA Deputy Director for EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, provided the following preview for the January 25 Foreign Affairs Council meeting of EU foreign ministers:

LADY ASHTON TAKES CHARGE

¶2. (C) Carmona started by pointing out that this will be the first Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) chaired by Lady Ashton, the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. According to Carmona, Lady Ashton deliberately included hard issues such as Iran and Bosnia on the agenda to give her the chance to set the EU's direction on these questions early on.

HAITI

¶3. (SBU/NF) Carmona said France will be represented at the FAC by State Secretary for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche, as Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner will be in Montreal for the conference on Haiti scheduled for the same day. Nevertheless, Haiti will be a key topic at the FAC, and development ministers will join foreign ministers in a discussion on how to better coordinate European emergency assistance efforts within the framework established by the UN. Carmona added that there is also a proposal on coordination of security and stabilization efforts, to be carried out by national gendarmerie and police units. Although the urgent nature of the situation precludes the slow decision making process required to launch a new ESDP mission, Carmona said the security coordination proposal will focus on presenting a unified European security assistance package designed to work under MINUSTAH. According to Carmona, the difficulties faced in responding to the Haiti earthquake have given new life to proposals to create a European Civil Protection Force (ECPF), as called for in Article 196 of the Lisbon Treaty. Although it is too late to create such a mechanism in time to provide assistance for Haiti, France sees an ECPF as available for rapid deployment outside of Europe, as well as for disasters that take place within EU borders.

YEMEN

¶4. (C) Carmona said the FAC would not address Yemen in great

depth, as the January 27 London conference would convene the most interested international actors. He said, however, that France agrees fully with the U.S. position described in ref A that, although there needs to be an immediate focus on counterterrorism efforts, the Yemeni government must find a long-term political solution to the Houthi rebellion and southern discontent.

AFGHANISTAN

¶5. (C/NF) The discussion on Afghanistan will focus on the possible announcement of a new EU Special Representative (EUSR) at the January 28 London conference. According to Carmona, Lady Ashton is pushing for a decision on a new EUSR by January 27 so that it can be announced in London. Carmona downplayed the withdrawal of the French candidate and added that the nomination process was now murkier, adding that he hoped a qualified candidate would come to the fore.

BOSNIA

¶6. (C/NF) On Bosnia, Carmona stressed that France - and indeed all EU member states - would not move forward without a transatlantic consensus, as obstructionist parties would exploit any splits in our policies. Carmona also acknowledged that, as the "5 plus 2" conditions had still not been met, it was too early to consider closing the Office of the High Representative (OHR), which is currently double-hatted as the EU Special Representative (EUSR).

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However, Carmona argued that, while the OHR was an institution that made sense in the context of the Dayton Accords, it was becoming an obstacle to progress. As the actions of Bosnian Serb leader Dodik show, politicians in that community now gain status by opposing the powers of the OHR. Meanwhile, Bosniaks and Croats have become dependent upon the OHR to exercise authority, and have lost all motivation to make compromises or show national leadership. However, since EU membership is the one objective all parties have in common, separating the EUSR position from the OHR may provide a better focus for positive cooperation. Carmona admitted that he did not think the OHR was the primary obstacle to progress in Bosnia, but said that Serb distaste for the OHR was making Euro-Atlantic integration more difficult. Carmona also argued that providing the OHR/EUSR with the "tool box" proposed for a post-OHR EUSR was unlikely to be effective under the current double-hatting arrangement due to strong communal differences on the OHR.

¶7. (SBU) Carmona said he did not expect significant discussion of EUFOR as consensus had already built in the EU to maintain the current mission mandate and force structure until the October 2010 elections, delaying implementation of the political decision already taken to convert into a smaller training mission.

SOMALIA

¶8. (SBU) Carmona said there will be a conclusion announcing a political decision to launch an ESDP training mission for Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces. However, as some member states continue to have concerns over funding and operational issues, foreign ministers will not issue a detailed or binding plan. Carmona said that while the concerns of member states were legitimate, they should not impede progress, and France wants to display its commitment to the proposal to the African Union and the UN.

IRAN

¶9. (C/NF) Iran will be the subject of a confidential lunch discussion. Carmona pointed out that heads of state asked at the December European Council for foreign ministers to take stock of the Iranian situation at the January FAC. Since Iran has not responded to the international community's offers of engagement, France strongly supports a UN Security Council resolution calling for new sanctions. In the context of accompanying EU sanctions, Carmona said the discussion at the FAC will focus on when to discuss a slate of new EU sanctions, and how tough they should be. Some member states want to wait until a new UNSCR is passed before starting work on developing new EU sanctions, and differences remain on what type of sanctions the EU should apply. France wants to move beyond sanctions on entities associated with proliferation and develop new economic sanctions to target the interests of the regime and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, while avoiding negative effects on the population to prevent a nationalist backlash. However, although Carmona was vague as to whether EU member states traditionally opposed to strong sanctions were showing more flexibility, he said he doubted the EU would manage consensus on the tough sanctions France was hoping for. No conclusions will be issued, in part, according to Carmona, to prevent giving China an excuse to push for minimalist sanctions at the UN on the argument that the EU will "do the dirty work anyway."

MOLDOVA

¶10. (SBU) Pierre Lellouche and the Romanian foreign minister are jointly hosting a breakfast with the Moldovan foreign minister, following up on Lellouche's November visit to Chisinau. Carmona said Lellouche will highlight the steps the EU has taken to assist Moldova, including the recent launching of negotiations on the EU-Moldova Association Agreement and plans to move towards a free trade agreement. However, to ensure continued progress towards European integration, Moldovan authorities must respond by making necessary reforms soon.
RIVKIN